

Sūrah Najm

Central Theme and Relationship with Previous *Sūrah*

This *sūrah* is the counterpart of Sūrah Tūr, the previous *sūrah*. The central theme of both *sūrahs* is the same: substantiation of reward and punishment. The only difference is that in the previous *sūrah* the aspect of torment is highlighted and in this one the concept of false intercession with which the Idolaters of Arabia were inflicted is refuted. The reason for this, as I have explained in the previous *sūrahs*, is that in the presence of this false belief threatening them with the greatest of punishments was of no avail. For this very reason, the Qur'ān has always mentioned *tawhīd* and the Hereafter side by side so that the Idolaters are not able to find any escape route. This reality is alluded to in the previous *sūrahs* while in this *sūrah* it is explained in detail. In other words, the common subject of both *sūrahs* is that the punishment of God is bound to come to the rejecters. They are relying on the intercession of their deities; in the first place, they are not a reality; they are mere names which they have invented and if they have some truth about them then the Almighty will deal with His people with perfect justice and fairness. There is no possibility that on that day the intercession of someone may add to His information or change His decision or turn falsehood into truth.

Besides the subject and central theme, a deliberation on the concluding verses of the previous *sūrah* and the opening verses of this *sūrah* will reveal very clear harmony between the two. The last verse of Sūrah Tūr: وَمِنَ اللَّيْلِ فَسَبَّحُهُ وَإِذْ بَارَ التُّجُومِ very aptly dovetails into the opening verse of this *sūrah*: وَالنَّجْمِ إِذَا هَوَىٰ. Such a link is found in most places in the Qur'ān – at some places, this link is between the words, at others between the meanings implied and at still others on both counts. I have alluded to such linkages in the previous *sūrah*.

Analysis of the Discourse

Verses (1-18)

In this introductory part, it has been elaborated that the Qur'an which is being recited to them is not the work of a soothsayer or a fortune-teller; the Almighty Himself has revealed it to the Prophet (sww) through His most trusted and dependable angel. All its verses are based on the truth

and what is stated in them is inevitable; there is not the slightest chance of any misguidance or falsehood in them. No one should have the misconception that the observations and experiences the Prophet (sws) is presenting about divine revelation and Gabriel are mere illusions or hallucinations. These observations are absolutely true and it is in the interest of its opponents to profess faith in the Prophet (sws) instead of showing hostility.

Verses (19-28)

The Idolaters of Makkah have been warned that their false idols, on the basis of which they are denying the warnings of the Qur'ān, are nothing but a creation of their fancy and have no reality. They are but names which they have invented; neither has the Almighty ever sanctioned their existence nor can sense and reason, instinct or intellect accept them. These are merely frivolous conjectures that they are following, even though there has come to them manifest guidance from their Lord; they must bear in mind that conjectures and suppositions cannot take the place of the truth, and false wishes and desires have no basis. They shall not encounter what they desire and shall only encounter the facts about which they are being warned. Hence, they must prepare themselves to face them. They must remember that all the matters of this world and the Hereafter are under the control of the Almighty and no one can interfere in them. There are many angels in the heavens whose intercession shall be of no benefit to anyone. The Almighty alone shall give permission to intercede to whom He wants and for whom He chooses. Therefore, the myth of regarding the angels the daughters of Allah and seeking refuge from the law of retribution and accountability in the Hereafter by baselessly supposing that they shall intercede for them is mere fanciful thinking on their part and shall certainly not be of any benefit to them.

Verses (29-32)

The Prophet (sws) has been solaced that he should turn away from the slaves to this world who are showing indifference to the Message of Allah and to leave them to themselves. This is the farthest limit of their knowledge and they have no awareness about the Hereafter. God best knows those who have strayed from His path and those who are rightly guided and He shall give each person his due. Whatever is in the heavens and the earth is under the sole jurisdiction of Allah and no one whosoever can save the evildoers from His punishment nor deprive the righteous of their reward. Only those shall be rewarded in the Hereafter who used to abstain from heinous sins and open indecencies and only indulged in occasional but minor sins to which they were induced, but never insisted

on them because indeed the Almighty is vast in mercy; He shall forgive them. As far as those proud and rebellious people are concerned who, on the basis of their race and creed and on the false pretext of intercession reckon that they shall be granted a high place in the Hereafter, they must not regard themselves to be too pious; the Almighty has knowledge of all their stages of creation and is also aware of their deeds.

Verses (33-55)

People who do not even have the spirit to spend in the path of the Almighty or make sacrifices and who vainly reckon that since they are the progeny of two great prophets – Abraham (sws) and Moses (sws) –are by birth entitled to Paradise are severely condemned on this attitude. Their attention is directed to the teachings and sacrifices of these prophets that their high rank and status are because of the unprecedented sacrifices they gave in the way of Allah and not because of their race or creed. A person's own deeds shall benefit him and they shall be of no use to others.

In this regard, it has also been emphatically explained that Allah alone gives comfort and pain, life and death, daughter and son, wealth and prosperity; therefore, a person should always attach oneself to the Almighty. Nations who remain indifferent to the Message of Allah and get deeply involved in worldly pleasures, in spite of their wealth and grandeur, meet the fate similar to the one met by the 'Ād and the Thamūd. Their remains still exist and everyone should learn a lesson from them.

Verses (56-62)

This concluding section of the *sūrah* refers to what had been stated in the beginning: the Quran is not the work of fortune-tellers or soothsayers but, like previous heavenly scriptures, is another Reminder. Now the threatened hour is nigh and it is giving its opponents a timely warning. If they still do not take heed, no one shall be able to save them from Allah. They should not express surprise and wonder at the reality of which this Reminder is warning them and should reform themselves. They should not laugh at it; in fact, its consequences are so grave that they should take it very seriously. They must pay heed and prostrate themselves in front of the Almighty.

Explanation

Section I: (Verses 1-18)

Text and Translation

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
 وَالتَّجْمِ إِذَا هَوَىٰ (١) مَا ضَلَّ صَاحِبُكُمْ وَمَا غَوَىٰ (٢) وَمَا يَنْطِقُ عَنِ الْهَوَىٰ (٣) إِنْ
 هُوَ إِلَّا وَحْيٌ يُوحَىٰ (٤) عَلَّمَهُ شَدِيدُ الْقُوَىٰ (٥) ذُو مِرَّةٍ فَاسْتَوَىٰ (٦) وَهُوَ بِالْأُفُقِ الْأَعْلَىٰ
 (٧) ثُمَّ دَنَا فَتَدَلَّى (٨) فَكَانَ قَابَ قَوْسَيْنِ أَوْ أَدْنَىٰ (٩) فَأَوْحَىٰ إِلَىٰ عَبْدِهِ مَا أَوْحَىٰ (١٠) مَا
 كَذَبَ الْفُؤَادُ مَا رَأَىٰ (١١) أَفَتُמَارُونَهُ عَلَىٰ مَا يَرَىٰ (١٢) وَلَقَدْ رَآهُ نَزْلَةً أُخْرَىٰ (١٣) عِنْدَ
 سِدْرَةِ الْمُنْتَهَىٰ (١٤) عِنْدَهَا جَنَّةُ الْمَأْوَىٰ (١٥) إِذْ يَغْشَى السِّدْرَةَ مَا يَغْشَىٰ (١٦) مَا زَاغَ
 الْبَصَرُ وَمَا طَغَىٰ (١٧) لَقَدْ رَأَىٰ مِنْ آيَاتِ رَبِّهِ الْكُبْرَىٰ (١٨)

The stars, when they fall, bear witness that your companion is neither lost nor has gone astray. And he does not speak out of his own fancy. This is but a revelation sent down to him. He was taught by an angel, mighty in power, towering in character, endued with wisdom. He appeared while he stood poised, being on the highest horizon. Then he drew near and came down within two bows' length or even closer. The Almighty then revealed to His servant that which He revealed. His heart did not deny his vision. So will you then quarrel with him over what he is seeing? (1-12)

And he beheld him once again near the farthest lote-tree, close to which is the Garden of Repose, when the lote-tree was being covered with that which was covering it. His sight did not falter nor lost its poise. He saw his Lord's great signs. (13-18)

Explanation

وَالْتَّجْمِ إِذَا هَوَىٰ (١)¹

Most exegetes are of the opinion that the word التَّجْمِ (star) here connotes the star cluster: Pleiades; however, there is no intrinsic or extrinsic contextual indication for this. A more evident indication could have been the Sirius star mentioned later in the *sūrah*. However, there is no occasion to regard it to be implied either, as will be explained later. In my opinion, it may connote genre and category the way it does in

1. The stars, when they fall.

(and by the stars they are guided, (16:16)) and (and the stars and the trees also bow down in adoration (5:6)) as well as is many similar verses of the Qur'ān.

The word هوى يهوى primarily means “falling of something from above”. This word is appropriate if used to connote the setting of stars and their vanishing from the horizon as well for the bombardment of meteors from the stars on the devils who try to eavesdrop on the news of the unseen (*ghayb*), as has been mentioned at several places in the Qur'ān.

The letter و in وَالنَّجْمِ is to signify an oath and I have explained at a number of places in this *tafsīr* that such oaths are meant to bear witness over a premise.

مَا ضَلَّ صَاحِبُكُمْ وَمَا غَوَى (٢) وَمَا يَنْطِقُ عَنِ الْهَوَى (٣) إِنْ هُوَ إِلَّا وَحْيٌ يُوحَى (٤)²

These verses form the complement of oath (*muqṣam 'alayh*). By swearing on the falling and setting of stars, the Quraysh are addressed and told that their companion (the Prophet Muḥammad (sww)) is neither lost nor has gone astray. Whatever he is reciting out to them is not from his own fancy; it is revealed to him from God so that it can be recited out to them for their guidance.

The occasion of the discourse bears evidence that this is a refutation of the allegation of soothsaying which the Quraysh made on him. When he used to read out the Qur'ān to the leaders of the Quraysh and also relate to them his experiences of the angel Gabriel and of divine revelations, they would try to convince their masses that he too is a soothsayer and an astrologer like their own soothsayers and astrologers. They would allege that just as after observing the meeting place and various zones of the stars and after receiving inspiration from the jinn, these soothsayers produce a poetical cum prosaic discourse and inform people of the matters of the unseen, in a similar manner he too produces a similar discourse and claims to know matters belonging to the future. They would further allege that his claim that an angel of God brings revelations to them is totally false and that just as the jinn give inspirations to their soothsayers, in a similar manner some jinn gives inspirations to him and he regards this jinn to be an angel.

This allegation of the Quraysh has been refuted at a number of places in the Qur'ān. In particular, some of its very important aspects are discussed at the end of Sūrah Shu'arā'. Here, in this verse, this allegation is refuted from another angle which begins with the falling and setting of

2. Bear witness that your companion is neither lost nor has gone astray. And he does not speak out of his own fancy. This is but a revelation sent down to him.

the stars.

By citing the falling and setting of the stars, the Qur'ān has refuted the beliefs of the Arabs which related to their soothsayers and astrologers with regard to two aspects.

Firstly, the sun, the moon and all other heavenly bodies do not have absolute authority nor can per se cast positive and negative influence; they are all subservient to God and are obedient to His commands. The manner in which they, with great precision and punctuality, rise and set as per an ordained timetable bears witness that they themselves do not have any power or authority and thus are neither worthy of being worshipped nor being regarded as the fountainhead of divine revelation and inspiration and thus be sought help from. This also shows that they should not be regarded as the source of calamities nor be beseeched for help to avoid them. Similarly, they should also not be regarded as the source of blessings nor be implored to grant them. The fact of the matter is that all these heavenly bodies prostrate before God and through this practice of theirs invite God's servants that they too serve God only and prostrate before Him alone. This topic though has been mentioned in the Qur'ān in various styles, however, the final word in this regard is the dialogue Abraham (sws) employed to conclusively convey the truth to his people.

Here it needs to be kept in consideration that soothsaying thrived and prospered because of its relationship with the jinn and devils, it also had deep links with the movement of the stars and the influence this movement cast. The Qur'ān has refuted this belief by saying وَاللَّجِيمِ إِذَا هَوَى: Stars by their very practice bear witness that they are subservient to the Creator of this universe. It is at His behest that they rise and at His bidding that they set; so foolish are the people who try to receive divine inspiration from them or try to find out the future through them; even more foolish are the people who call the messengers of God astrologers and soothsayers even though all the teachings of these messengers strongly refutes their baseless practices.

Secondly, to refute the claim of the soothsayers that they have connections with such jinn as inform them of divine matters; they have no such access. The jinn and the devils who eavesdrop in the heavens in order to listen to such matters are pelted by meteors to shoo them away. The Almighty has made this special arrangement for this purpose. In Sūrah Ṣāffāt, the words are:

إِلَّا مَنْ خَطِفَ الْخَطْفَةَ فَأَتْبَعَهُ شِهَابٌ ثَاقِبٌ (١٠:٣٧)

Except one who tries to snatch [some words] will be pursued by a burning meteor. (37:10)

The jinn themselves have confessed to this arrangement made by the Almighty in the following words:

وَأَنَّا كُنَّا نَقْعُدُ مِنْهَا مَقَاعِدَ لِلسَّمْعِ فَمَنْ يَسْتَمِعِ الْآنَ يَجِدْ لَهُ شِهَابًا رَصَدًا (٩:٧٢)

And we deeply observed the heavens and found it filled with stern guards and darting meteors. (9:72)

It is by referring to these meteors in Sūrah Wāqī'ah (56:75-78), Sūrah Hāqqah (69:38-43) and Sūrah Takwīr (82:15-25), the Almighty has regarded the Qur'ān to be absolutely devoid of Satanic interference, and has explained that no jinn or devil has access to the Qur'ān. If any of them tries to reach it, he is pelted with shooting stars. Devils can neither reach the guarded tablet in which the Qur'ān is preserved nor influence the majestic angel who descends with it nor can lead astray the messenger to whom it is revealed. Devils come into contact with only those soothsayers who are worthless liars and wretches and in order to deceive people put up a false display and claim to have access to divine matters.

Once this relationship between the oath and its complement is understood, it is essential to fully grasp the words and meanings of these verses so that the whole discourse is completely understood.

The word ضَلَّ generally occurs for such error of a person as is a result of forgetfulness or because of an unintentional intellectual mistake while غَوَى relates to that error which is also a result of a person's base desires and intentional planning.

The word صَاحِب here is used for the Prophet (sws) and the addressed pronoun is for the Quraysh. They are told that the Prophet (sws) is their very close companion and not a stranger to them. They very well know his past and present as well as his character and conduct and his tastes and inclination. Have they ever seen any urge in him that could raise the doubt in their mind that he has a proclivity for astrology and soothsaying? If a person has such a proclivity, it does not remain hidden for the whole of his life from close companions. However, it is very strange that what they have never witnessed in him for such a long time, they are now blaming him for it once he expressed his claim to be a prophet of God. The fact of the matter is that his whole life and his words bear witness to the fact that he has never been besmeared by any error that is the result of forgetfulness, base desires, intentional or unintentional planning.

The word وَمَا يَنْطِقُ عَنِ الْهَوَى in عَنِ الْهَوَى is used to point to the source and origin: whatever discourse he is presenting before them does not

originate from his own self. His discourse is in fact a divine revelation which the Almighty has sent to him for their guidance. These words are also a sarcastic remark on the soothsayers and astrologers: while their discourses arise from their own selves, the origin of the prophet's discourse is from a sublime source belonging to the realm of the divine.

The verse primarily refers to the Qur'ān which the Prophet (sws) was presenting as divine revelation. Thus the succeeding verse **إِنَّ هُوَ إِلَّا وَحْيِي يُوحَى** explains this aspect. However, since a prophet is infallible in matters of religion and since every word and deed of his is an example for his followers, none of his actions is against justice and fairness even in matters which relate to every day life. If ever he commits a mistake, the Almighty corrects Him.

عَلَّمَهُ شَدِيدُ الْقُوَى³(٥)

After the attributes of the discourse and those of the person to whom it was revealed are stated, mentioned here are the attributes of Gabriel who brought it down to the Prophet (sws). The words **شَدِيدُ الْقُوَى** show that he possesses all higher attributes and abilities and each of them is sound and well-grounded. There is absolutely no possibility that any other spirit influence or over-awe him or deceive or cause any confusion in the instruction of the book or that he himself commit any mistake or be afflicted with doubt or uncertainty. The Almighty has protected him from all such weaknesses so that he is able to discharge the responsibility entrusted to him with full honesty and sincerity. In Sūrah Takwīr, he is described thus:

إِنَّهُ لَقَوْلُ رَسُولٍ كَرِيمٍ ذِي قُوَّةٍ عِنْدَ ذِي الْعَرْشِ مَكِينٍ مُطَاعٍ ثَمَّ أَمِينٍ (٨١: ١٩-٢١)

This is the word brought by a noble messenger. He is endued with great power and held in honour before the Lord of the Throne. He is obeyed and is very trustworthy. (81:19-21)

The expression **ذُو مِرَّةٍ** means that he is very stable and secure in both his intellect and his character. There is no possibility of him being deceived or being sold or bought. This word is used for intellectual and moral superiority.

It needs to be appreciated that these attributes of Gabriel are not merely mentioned here to disparage the origin and source of inspiration of the soothsayers and astrologers; in fact, the Jews and their associates: the

3. He was taught by an angel, mighty in power,

extremist Shiites would, God forbid, blame the Prophet (sws) for being dishonest, biased and lacking in wisdom as has been alluded to in the *tafsīr* of Sūrah Baqarah. For this very reason, they always remained enemies of Gabriel, as has been referred to by the Qur'ān.

ذُو مِرَّةٍ فَاسْتَوَى (٦) وَهُوَ بِالْأُفُقِ الْأَعْلَى (٧) ثُمَّ دَنَا فَتَدَلَّى (٨) فَكَانَ قَابَ قَوْسَيْنِ أَوْ أَدْنَى (٩) فَأَوْحَى إِلَى عَبْدِهِ مَا أَوْحَى (١٠)⁴

The word ذُو مِرَّةٍ is related to شَدِيدُ الْقُوَى. That is why it has been explained in conjunction with the latter earlier. From the word فَاسْتَوَى begins a description of the nature of teaching referred to above by the words: Gabriel instructed the Prophet (sws) in a very painstaking way and with great affection and attention taught him the divine revelation which was revealed to him by God. The ف in the word فَاسْتَوَى is for description: initially, he appeared in his original form and stood straight. The place of his appearance was on the higher horizon of the heavens. Higher horizon refers to the one found right on top of one's head. If something appears from this horizon, it will look as clear, sharp and unambiguous as the full moon or the midday sun. On the other hand, if something appears from the eastern, western, northern or southern horizon it will be vague and indistinct just like the new moon on the first day. The purpose of this explanation is that Gabriel appeared before the Prophet (sws) from the higher horizon, and the Prophet (sws) was able to fully observe him with his eyes.

The word تَدَلَّى means “to bend” or “to hang”. This describes the fact that Gabriel in order to teach the Prophet (sws) came near him and just as an affectionate and elderly teacher bends over his dear student with great fondness, he too bent over the Prophet (sws). In other words, it was not that he taught the Prophet (sws) from a distance without caring whether he had fully heard him or not and if he did, was able to understand it or not; on the contrary, with full attention and focus, he delivered the words in a manner that he be able to fully hear and understand them. Here it needs to be kept in consideration that the knowledge provided by the devils of the soothsayers is mentioned in by the Qur'ān as (:) : حِطْفَ الْحِطَفَةِ : It is a stolen piece of information which thieves and crooks have gotten hold of. Obviously, when the teachers are

4. Towering in character, endowed with wisdom. He appeared while he stood poised, being on the highest horizon. Then he drew near and came down within two bows' length or even closer. The Almighty then revealed to His servant that which He revealed.

thieves, they would only be teaching their students the way thieves do. The Qur'ān has here prominently mentioned the nature and method of teaching of Gabriel so that the difference in teaching of both is fully highlighted.

In فَكَانَ قَابَ قَوْسَيْنِ أَوْ أَدْنَى the word قَابَ means “to the extent” and refers to ultimate proximity and nearness. That is, Gabriel came so near the Prophet (sws) that a distance of two bows or even less remained. This comparison also takes into account the Arab taste for they were a people very conversant and familiar with bows and arrows and to express great nearness would use the comparison of one bow's length or two bows' length in the very way we say in our language one meter or two meters. The word “or” here conveys the fact that this comparison is merely an expression for nearness; for the distance can even be less.

In فَأَوْحَىٰ إِلَىٰ عَبْدِهِ مَا أَوْحَى the subject of أَوْحَىٰ can be God as well as Gabriel. In the first case, the meaning is absolutely clear: God in an elaborate manner revealed to His servant ie Muḥammad (sws) that which He wanted to reveal. In the second case, the antecedent of the genitive pronoun in عَبْدِهِ will be God and the meaning would be that with attention and thoroughness Gabriel revealed to the servant of God what He wanted to reveal or revealed that which God had directed Gabriel to reveal. My inclination is towards the first of these interpretations and there is nothing particularly wrong with the second one either. Some Sufis have absolutely wrongly concluded from this verse that the Almighty, God forbid, has regarded Muḥammad to be a servant of Gabriel. I have continued to point out in this *tafsīr* in the light of various examples that the antecedents of pronouns are determined through contextual indications. Multiplicity (*intishār*) in antecedents is not a defect in every case; in many cases, it creates brevity which is part of the eloquence found in the discourse of the Arabs.

مَا كَذَّبَ الْمُتَوَّادُ مَا رَأَى (١١)⁵

This is God's attestation to the Prophet's observation: no one should regard this observation to be a result of his fancy or deception of his inner self; it was none of these and in reality, the Prophet (sws) fully observed him.

I have mentioned earlier that when the Prophet (sws) mentioned these observations to his adversaries, they made fun of him. They said that that he saw his hidden desires in his dreams and by regarding his dreamy Paradise to be a reality he related them to people to over-awe them

5. His heart did not deny his vision.

whereas all of them were the products of his fancy and delusions from his inner-self. The Qur'ān has negated this allegation at many places in various styles. In the *tafsīr* of Sūrah Takwīr, more details will be provided.

أَفْتُمَارُونَهُ عَلَىٰ مَا يَرَىٰ (١٢)^٦

The adversaries of the Prophet (sws) are addressed in this verse and rebuked for disputing with the Prophet (sws) on his observations. The fact of the matter is that he informs them of only what he sees with his eyes and hears with his ears. If they are not able to see this, then this will not negate the reality.

Here it needs to be kept in consideration that the adversaries of the Prophet (sws) would believe in all the nonsense the soothsayers would convey to them without any hesitation because whatever they would say would be in accordance with their desires; however, the call of the Prophet (sws) was against their desires and for this reason they would raise all kinds of doubts to oppose him.

وَلَقَدْ رَآهُ نَزْلَةً أُخْرَىٰ (١٣) عِنْدَ سِدْرَةِ الْمُنْتَهَىٰ (١٤) عِنْدَهَا جَنَّةُ الْمَأْوَىٰ (١٥)^٧

It is not that this was a one-time observation by the Prophet (sws) and thus could be regarded as a mistake or a result of his imagination; he saw Gabriel again near the farthest lote-tree near which is also the garden of repose. The implication is that they should not make fun of the observation he is presenting to them; it is something which requires their serious consideration. It may be kept in mind that here only two initial observations are presented in response to people who were the pioneers in making fun of the Prophet's observations. This does not mean that he saw Gabriel only twice. After these two initial observations, Gabriel started regularly appearing before him in various forms and at different times. So much so, he became the Prophet's most known, frequent and cherished visitor.

The place of the farthest lote-tree is the one where this world of ours ends. It seems that this lote-tree divides our world from the divine realm which is beyond our observation. Neither are we aware of the boundaries of these two worlds nor of the reality of this sign called the lote-tree which bifurcates the two. These things belong to the category of the *mutashābihāt*. Hence as per the directive of the Qur'ān, it is essential to profess faith in them and one should not try to determine their real form

6. So will you then quarrel with him over what he is seeing?

7. And he beheld him once again near the farthest lote-tree, close to which is the Garden of Repose,

and shape. Only God knows their real form. The knowledge of those who have sound knowledge increases through such things. People who make efforts to try to find out their real form and shape, falter and go astray.

The words *عِنْدَهَا جَنَّةُ الْمَأْوَى* specify the place of the lote-tree: it is near the garden of repose. Discussion on this garden can be seen in verse nineteen of Sūrah Sajdah. It seems that just as the lote tree is at the place this world ends, the Garden of Repose is at the place the divine realm begins. It is evident from this stipulation that the Prophet (sws) observed Gabriel the second time at the point these two worlds met.

إِذْ يَغْشَى السَّدْرَةَ مَا يَغْشَى⁸ (١٦)

Described in this verse is the nature of the observation: when the lote-tree was covered with that which was covering it. These words point to the fact that at that time divine manifestations were so numerous on the lote-tree that words are unable to express them.

مَا زَاغَ الْبَصَرُ وَمَا طَغَى⁹ (١٧)

Just as earlier on, the words were: *مَا كَذَبَ الْفُؤَادُ مَا رَأَى* (his heart did not deny his vision, (53:11)), it is stated that at the instance of this second observation that his sight did not falter nor lose its poise; whatever he observed was observed with full concentration and attention.

The word *زَیَغَ* means “to bend or to distort” something. The implication is that the Prophet’s sight did not bend from its correct angle in the observation of a divine manifestation; on the contrary, he observed everything from a correct angle. The word *طَغَى* means “to lose poise and balance”. The implication of the word is that though so numerous were the divine manifestations that words are unable to express them, yet his sight did not lose control the slightest. In fact, he deeply and fully observed everything.

لَقَدْ رَأَى مِنْ آيَاتِ رَبِّهِ الْكُبْرَى¹⁰ (١٨)

This verse refers to the observations of the Prophet (sws) at that instant: indeed, he saw his Lord’s great signs. The Qur’ān does not provide details of any of these signs because not only are they beyond words, but also they are beyond human intellect. However, the word *كُبْرَى* (great) bears witness to the fact that these signs were above and beyond the ones every

8. When the lote-tree was being covered with that which was covering it.

9. His sight did not falter nor lost its poise.

10. Indeed, he saw his Lord’s great signs.

man of vision can observe in the world within him and that which surrounds him. Our exegetes are of the opinion that these signs refer to the ones the Prophet (sws) saw in his divine journey to the skies. What supports their opinion is that in Sūrah Banī Isrāʾīl where this journey is mentioned, it is stated that he observed great signs of his Lord. However, it must be kept in consideration that he only observed the signs of God; there is no indication that he observed God Himself.

This introductory portion of the *sūrah* may now be summarized so that the remaining portion is easily understood.

People who by regarding the Qurʾān to be a product of soothsaying and astrology wanted to belittle its status are addressed and told:

1. They should not regard the Day of Judgement which the Qurʾān is informing them of to be something ordinary. The Qurʾān is not at all like the nonsensical uttering of their soothsayers and astrologers that has been concocted by its presenter. It is in fact a revelation from God which He has delivered to a special servant of His through His loftiest angel. The purpose is to fully inform them of this day before its advent.

2. The angel who has brought down this divine revelation is held in high esteem by God and that is why he has been selected by God for this task. He is the most trustworthy; he cannot show dishonesty in what he has been entrusted with; he is also very powerful and no one can dare overpower or over-awe him; he has been blessed with all high moral attributes and intellectual abilities and hence there is no possibility that he may be afflicted with any misconception or someone may deceive him or that he may show bias to someone or unjustly oppose anyone.

3. This angel was twice seen by the Prophet (sws) very clearly. In the first instance, he saw him in the higher horizon and in the second near the farthest lote-tree. There is absolutely no possibility that this observation that he has stated to them be a product of his fancy.

4. The angel taught the Prophet (sws) the way an affectionate teacher instructs his pupil by going near him and bending over him. The Prophet (sws) fully grasped and understood this instruction. It is not that he heard some words coming from a distant source of which he was not sure what he heard and understood.

Section II: Verses (19-30)

In the succeeding verses, the adversaries of the Prophet (sws) are warned that they have no basis not to fear of the Day of Judgement which they are being so elaborately and thoroughly informed of. Are they depending on the intercession of their self-claimed deities: Lāt, Manāt

and ‘Uzzā? If this is true, then they should remember that they are merely hypothetical names which qualify no one in the real world. Reward and punishment is a reality. They cannot combat reality with conjecture. Whatever false wishes they have nurtured in their hearts are mere desires; it is not certain that they materialize. All the affairs of the heavens and the earth are in the hands of God. Not even an angel can open his mouth in the presence of God without His permission. Those who have named angels after women, and are indifferent to the Qur’ān because of depending on them have only made a back door to escape the accountability of the Hereafter. However, even this will be of no benefit to them. God knows best the righteous from the wrong-doers.

In the light of this background, readers may proceed to read the next section of verses.

Text and Translation

أَفَرَأَيْتُمُ اللَّاتَ وَالْعُزَّىٰ (١٩) وَمَنَاةَ الثَّالِثَةَ الْأُخْرَىٰ (٢٠) أَلَكُمُ الذَّكَرُ وَلَهُ الْأُنثَىٰ (٢١)
تِلْكَ إِذَا قِسْمَةٌ ضِيزَىٰ (٢٢) إِنَّ هِيَ إِلَّا أَسْمَاءُ سَمَّيْتُمُوهَا أَنْتُمْ وَأَبَاؤُكُمْ مَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ بِهَا
مِنْ سُلْطَانٍ إِنْ يَتَّبِعُونَ إِلَّا الظَّنَّ وَمَا تَهْوَى الْأَنْفُسُ وَلَقَدْ جَاءَهُمْ مِنْ رَبِّهِمُ الْهُدَىٰ
(٢٣) أَمْ لِلْإِنْسَانِ مَا تَمَنَّى (٢٤) فَلِلَّهِ الْآخِرَةُ وَالْأُولَىٰ (٢٥) وَكَمْ مِّن مَّلَكٍ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ لَا
تُعْنِي شَفَاعَتُهُمْ شَيْئًا إِلَّا مِّنْ بَعْدِ أَنْ يَأْذَنَ اللَّهُ لِمَنْ يَشَاءُ وَيَرْضَىٰ (٢٦) إِنَّ الَّذِينَ لَا
يُؤْمِنُونَ بِالْآخِرَةِ لَيَسْمُوكَ الْمَلَائِكَةَ تَسْمِيَةً الْأُنثَىٰ (٢٧) وَمَا لَهُمْ بِهِ مِنْ عِلْمٍ إِنْ يَتَّبِعُونَ
إِلَّا الظَّنَّ وَإِنَّ الظَّنَّ لَا يُغْنِي مِنَ الْحَقِّ شَيْئًا (٢٨) فَأَعْرِضْ عَنْ مَّن تَوَلَّىٰ عَنْ ذِكْرِنَا وَلَمْ
يُرِدْ إِلَّا الْحَيَاةَ الدُّنْيَا (٢٩) ذَلِكَ مَبْلَغُهُمْ مِّنَ الْعِلْمِ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ هُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِمَنْ ضَلَّ عَنْ سَبِيلِهِ
وَهُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِمَنِ اهْتَدَىٰ (٣٠)

Have you ever pondered over Lāt and ‘Uzzā and the third Manāt which is next in rank below them? For your own selves you like sons and for Him daughters! This indeed is a division unjust! They are but names which you and your fathers have invented in whose favour the Almighty has revealed no argument. They follow conjectures and the whims of their own souls, even though there has already come to them a manifest guidance from their Lord. (19-23)

Will man attain all that he desires? Therefore, remember that the Hereafter and this world are under the control of Allah. And how many angels are there in the heavens whose intercession shall be of no avail until the Almighty gives permission to whom He wants and for whom He chooses. (24-26)

Those who do not believe in the Hereafter call the angels by the names of women. Yet of this they have no knowledge; They merely follow conjecture and conjecture can never take the place of truth. Therefore, turn away from those who turn away from Our Reminder and seek only the life of this world. This is the farthest limit of their knowledge. Your Lord fully knows those who have strayed from His path and those who are rightly guided. (27-30)

Explanation

أَفَرَأَيْتُمُ اللَّاتَ وَالْعُزَّىٰ (١٩) وَمَنَاةَ الثَّالِثَةَ الْأُخْرَىٰ (٢٠)¹¹

The question posed in these verses is meant to express amazement and humiliation. Earlier on, the attributes of Gabriel were mentioned: He is mighty in power, towering in character, endowed with wisdom. In Sūrah Takwīr, the words are: مُطَاع (he is obeyed, (81:21)) and عِنْدَ ذِي الْعَرْشِ (held in honour before the Lord of the Throne, (81:20)) and I have already discussed what these attributes tacitly imply. Here another special aspect of his is worthy of attention which becomes evident from the humiliating style of this verse: a little deliberation shows that the attributes of Gabriel mentioned are very commendable manly ones. In other words, the Quraysh are rebuked by referring to these attributes of this exalted angel: how can these angels having such lofty manly attributes be compared to their deities? : Lāt, ‘Uzzā and Manāt about whom they think that they are God’s daughters and whom they have named after women.

It will become evident from succeeding verses that all three of them are symbols of the angels. It has been pointed out at a number of places in this *tafsīr* that the Idolaters of Arabia regarded the angels to be daughters of God and thought that God did whatever they said. For this reason, these deities were able to procure for their worshippers sustenance and children in this world and if ever there was going to be a Day of Judgment they would have them go scot-free without any punishment. In particular, these three deities had a great status for them. Their recommendation and intercession was considered to bear certain results. About them, they believed *تلك الغرائق العلى وإن شفاعتهن لترتجى* (these are deities of exalted status and there is full hope that their recommendations will be accepted).

There is no need to get into a discussion as to which among the tribes of Arabia worshipped which one of them. It is possible that a particular

11. Have you ever pondered over Lāt and ‘Uzzā and the third Manāt which is next in rank below them?

tribe specially related itself to one of them; however, all the Idolaters of Arabia equally acknowledged their exaltedness. In order to express and impose their political and religious leadership over the whole of Arabia, the Quraysh had gathered the statues of all the deities in the holy *ka'bah*. Since the worshippers of these three deities in Arabia outnumbered all others, the Quraysh too revered them the most.

It is also evident from the Qur'ān that though these three deities were regarded as the most exalted in the eyes of Arabs yet between them there were gradations in status. Lāt and 'Uzzā had the highest status. Though Manāt was also regarded as very exalted yet it was lower in rank to the other two. Thus the Qur'ān has qualified it with the attributes: *ثالثة* and *أخرى*. The first of these refers to its placement amongst the highest of the deities and the second of them informs us of its relative rank as compared to the rest of the two: though it belongs to their category yet it is second in stature to them. The words *أولى* and *أخرى* are known in Arabic to express rank and status and have been used in this in the Qur'ān as well. A clear example of this usage can be seen in the following verse: *وَقَالَتْ أُولَاهُمْ لِأَخْرَاهُمْ فَمَا كَانَ لَكُمْ عَلَيْنَا مِنْ فَضْلٍ فَذُوقُوا الْعَذَابَ بِمَا كُنْتُمْ تَكْسِبُونَ* (39:7) (Then the first will say to the last: "You were no better than we. Taste the penalty of your misdeeds," (7:39)).

A better part of the discussions found in the *tafsīr* books regarding the etymology and meaning of these names is baseless. In my opinion, the name is *اللات* (al-Lāt) a distorted form of *الآلهة* (al-Ālihah). Just as the greatest of the worshipped is *الله* they had adopted the name *الآلهة* for their greatest deity which the common masses with their repeated use of the word had converted to *اللات*. Some people regard it from the root *لَتَّ* which means "to dissolve and to knead". They thought that this was the name of a person who fed the pilgrims in the times of *hajj* by making a beverage in which they would dissolve barley in water. After his death, people started worshipping his grave and he came to be regarded by this name as a deity. This opinion is not only wrong as far as etymology is concerned, it is also against Qur'ānic stipulations. It is evident from the Qur'ān that they were statues of deities and they were carved out by naming the angels after women.

The word *عُزَّى* obviously is the feminine form of *عَزِيز* ('Azīz) and *أَعَزَّ* (A'azza). *عَزِيز* is a prominent attribute of God which portrays His exaltedness and reverence. From this very aspect, this deity is called *عُزَّى*.

In my opinion the word *مَنَات* is from the root *منية* which would mean a deity coming close to which is greatly cherished or which is a means to grant wishes.

أَلَكُمُ الذَّكَرُ وَلَهُ الْأُنثَى (٢١) تِلْكَ إِذًا قِسْمَةٌ ضِيزَى (٢٢)¹²

There is sarcasm in these sentences: the Arabs like male offspring and hate female offspring to the extent that whenever a girl is born to them they start hiding themselves from others out of embarrassment. So when such are their feelings about the female gender they should at least be gracious enough to not impute to others what they dislike for their own selves. What justice can be seen in this distribution for God has created all but they associate daughters to Him and sons to their own selves? This distribution is absolutely unfair and unmerited. It was but just and fair that what they disliked for themselves should not have been related by them to God.

The word ضِيزَى means “something which is unjust and unfair”. The verb ضَارَ would mean ظَلَمَهُ (he oppressed him; he was unjust to him).

The implication of the whole verse is that ascribing sons or daughters to God is in the first place totally against God’s oneness as well as human nature and intellect; they have shown further injustice by ascribing to God what they regard a means of embarrassment for themselves. This only means that they regard God to be even inferior in status to themselves.

إِنْ هِيَ إِلَّا أَسْمَاءٌ سَمَّيْتُمُوهَا أَنْتُمْ وَآبَاؤُكُمْ مِمَّا أُنْزِلَ اللَّهُ بِهَا مِنْ سُلْطَانٍ إِنْ يَتَّبِعُونَ إِلَّا الظَّنَّ وَمَا تَهْوَى الْأَنْفُسُ وَلَقَدْ جَاءَهُمْ مِنْ رَبِّهِمُ الْهُدَى (٢٣)¹³

Expressed in these verses is the reality of these deities: they are merely names which they and their forefathers have given them and they do not represent any one in the real world. The Almighty has not revealed any sanction in their favour which they can present in their support. If they have found their forefathers worshipping them, then this is not reason enough. They too like them worshipped these deities while blindly following their own forefathers. God’s sanction in this regard could have been found in human nature and intellect or could have been found in God’s signs scattered not only in the world around man but also in the world within him or could have been directly communicated to them through His prophets and messengers. He could have said that such and such are his favourite daughters whose recommendation He always

12. For your own selves you like sons and for Him daughters! This indeed is a division unjust!

13. They are but names which you and your fathers have invented in whose favour the Almighty has revealed no argument. They follow conjectures and the whims of their own souls, even though there has already come to them a manifest guidance from their Lord.

accepts and forgives all those who worship these deities. When none of these sanctions exists, then they are merely names invented by them and their forefathers and the beings they qualify do not exist in reality.

Consider next the portion: *إِنْ يَتَّبِعُونَ إِلَّا الظَّنَّ وَمَا تَهْوَى الْأَنْفُسُ وَلَقَدْ جَاءَهُمْ مِّن رَّبِّهِمُ الْهُدَى*. In the previous portions of this set of verses, the discourse was set in direct address. Here the discourse has become indirect. This is a rebuke on their deprivation and misfortune and an expression of sorrow on their intellectual decadence: God Himself had specially revealed His guidance to them; however instead of following it, they started following their own conjectures and their own whims.

The word *الْهُدَى* is used for the guidance which the Almighty has revealed in the form of the Qur'ān and Sunnah and whose exaltedness and purity has been mentioned in the introductory verses of the *sūrah*. Following conjecture and whims is dangerous in all circumstances; however, following them in spite of the presence of divine guidance is like throwing one self into the pit of death in broad daylight.

The words *وَمَا تَهْوَى الْأَنْفُسُ* specifically refer to the innovation of polytheism of these people which is under discussion. The reason is that every innovation originates from some personal whim or wish. When a person's soul does not find in itself the strength to fulfil the demands of a reality and its denial is also not easy for it, then it tries to adopt ways which apparently do not seem to be its denial yet are able to afford it with a route to escape heavy responsibilities thereby imposed. Whatever religious innovation one reflects on, one will find this fiend of human whim and desire hidden in it.

Obviously, there existed no intellectual or scriptural arguments in favour of these deities; however, in order to silence every indicator for reward and punishment, Satan tried to deceive these Idolaters by saying that angels were daughters of God and that such and such daughters were specially dear to Him. They tried to convince them that He listens to what these special ones say to Him and that if they intercede, He necessarily honours them. Hence all those who worship them and make offerings at their altars will win God's favour through their intercession and be granted wealth and children in this world and a high status in the Hereafter if ever it comes about. In this manner, success in this world and the next was rendered an easy affair and any danger of accountability and reward and punishment in the Hereafter was warded off.

However, if one deliberates on this issue, what else is the reason behind this mythology other than personal desire and fancy? A person's inner-self wanted that a way be found to procure God's nearness and Paradise so that it did not have to sacrifice any of its desires. Satan showed it this way.

أَمْ لِلْإِنْسَانِ مَا تَمَنَّى (٢٤) فَلِلَّهِ الْآخِرَةُ وَالْأُولَى (٢٥)¹⁴

This is an expression of amazement on what is said above as well as a comment on it. The implication is that it is up to them to carve out any philosophy in the guidance of their whims and desires to please themselves; however, it is not necessary that all their desires will be granted; there is a great difference between reality and desire; when they face reality, only then will they realize that they were building castles in the air – castles whose foundations are built on sand; none of their deities will be able to help them in any way; each person will be faced with his deeds; those whose good deeds abound will enter Paradise and those in whom evil deeds abound will be cast into Hell regardless of who they are.

Here it needs to be kept in consideration that just as the Idolaters of Arabia had nurtured a lot of baseless desires in their hearts whilst relying on their deities, the Jews, Christians and Muslims too had a lot of desires in their hearts which were a product of their fancy. I have already alluded to the details of the desires of the Jews and Christians which the Qur’ān calls as *amāniyyu* in the *tafsīr* of Sūrah Baqarah and Sūrah Āl ‘Imrān. In my book *Haqīqat-e Shirk-o Tawhīd*, I have elaborated upon the beliefs which Muslims while following the Jews and Christians had invented against the Qur’ān and Sunnah. By using the general word “man” in this verse, the Qur’ān has addressed each and every individual without any exception and informed him that whatever wishes and desires a person may harbour in his heart is up to him; however, he should remember that desires neither alter the reality nor will the law of God show bias for any one in the slightest way.

The words *فَلِلَّهِ الْآخِرَةُ وَالْأُولَى* signify that if any person wrongly wishes that the laws and practices of God will change to accommodate his desires, then he should fully know that both this world and the next are in the complete control of God; no one has the status or stature to intercede before Him for someone without His permission or to try to affect a change in His laws or decisions.

وَكَم مِّن مَّلَكٍ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ لَا تُغْنِي شَفَاعَتُهُمْ شَيْئًا إِلَّا مِن بَعْدِ أَن يَأْذَنَ اللَّهُ لِمَن يَشَاءُ وَيَرْضَى (٢٦)¹⁵

This verse further explains the previous one: not to speak of these

14. Will man attain all that he desires? Therefore, remember that the Hereafter and this world are under the control of Allah.

15. And how many angels are there in the heavens whose intercession shall be of no avail until the Almighty gives permission to whom He wants and for whom He chooses.

deities of the Idolaters there are many angels, both of high and low rank, present in the heavens whose intercession will be of no avail to anyone except if God permits them. In the first place, no one will dare open his mouth without the permission of God and whoever tries to open it will only be allowed to do so in favour of the person for whom God will permit his intercession.

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ بِالْآخِرَةِ لَيُسَمُّونَ الْمَلَائِكَةَ تَسْمِيَةً الْأُنثَى¹⁶ (٢٧)

This verse points to the people who have fabricated this mythology: they are the ones who do not have faith in the Hereafter; even if they accept it in the capacity of a supposition, they do not have belief in the reality of the Hereafter as the Day on which the complete justice of God will manifest itself and each person will be rewarded or punished in accordance with his deeds. It is these people who have named angels after women and concocted the mythology that they are beloved daughters of God and it is through their intercession alone that the favours of this life are won and if there ever is a hereafter, then it is they who will become their real helpers and will make God grant them all they want.

وَمَا لَهُمْ بِهِ مِنْ عِلْمٍ إِنْ يَتَّبِعُونَ إِلَّا الظَّنَّ وَإِنَّ الظَّنَّ لَا يُغْنِي مِنَ الْحَقِّ شَيْئًا¹⁷ (٢٨)

Though they have fabricated this folk-tale to save their skins from the responsibilities of the Hereafter, it is based on mere conjecture. Merely to fulfil their fancies, they are indulging in blatant conjecture. These foolish people do not know that conjecture is what it is and cannot replace reality in any way. When the reality manifests itself, they will come to know that they had been only dreaming throughout their lives.

In verse 23, the word ظَنُّ has been used in contrast to the word الْهُدَى (the guidance). Here it has been used in contrast to both عِلْم (knowledge) and حَقُّ (the truth). Knowledge is not only obtained through innate guidance and through one's intellect but also through divine revelations. Knowledge which is obtained through divine revelation in fact occupies the status of الْهُدَى (the guidance) because it is beyond any shadow of doubt. Thus it has also been called حَقُّ (the truth). What is not substantiated by innate guidance and intellect nor by divine revelation is in fact totally speculative and baseless. The Qur'ān by using the words وَمَا لَهُمْ بِهِ مِنْ عِلْمٍ has stripped this mythology of the Idolaters from every support of knowledge and

16. Those who do not believe in the Hereafter call the angels by the names of women.

17. Yet of this they have no knowledge; they follow merely conjecture and conjecture can never take the place of truth.

thereby regarded it to be a fabricated tale. In other words, in its favour, they neither have any corroboration by reason nor revelation. The Arabs were fully aware of this reality that what is not substantiated by reason cannot be regarded as knowledge; it is mere conjecture (ظَنٌّ) which has no basis. The famous classical poet Ṭarfah ibn al-‘Abd has distinguished between conjecture and knowledge in the following manner:

وَأَعْلَمُ عِلْمًا لَيْسَ بِالظَّنِّ أَنَّهُ

(and I know what is based on knowledge which is not conjecture so that ...)¹⁸

There is another aspect of conjecture (ظَنٌّ) which I will inshallah explain under the following verse of Sūrah Hāqqah: إِنِّي ظَنَنْتُ أَنِّي مُلَاقٍ جَسَاسِيهِ (٢٠:٦٩).

فَأَعْرِضْ عَنْ مَن تَوَلَّى عَنْ ذِكْرِنَا وَلَمْ يُرِدْ إِلَّا الْحَيَاةَ الدُّنْيَا (٢٩)¹⁹

Here the Prophet (sws) has been directed that people who are so arrogant and big-headed that instead of following the guidance of God they want to follow their own fancies and instead of knowledge want to rely on conjecture and in place of good want to tread the path of evil, he should not pursue them much. If they have shown indifference to God's guidance, then the Prophet (sws) too should ignore them; he has discharged his responsibility; now it is their responsibility; soon they shall witness its consequences.

The word ذَكْرُ here refers to the Qur'ān. It is used for it at many instances, and it has various aspects to which I have alluded at various places. Here it is used in this sense because the Qur'ān is reminding them of the Hereafter and its responsibilities – people who have become indifferent to them because of reliance on their imaginary deities.

The words وَلَمْ يُرِدْ إِلَّا الْحَيَاةَ الدُّنْيَا refer to the real reason behind their denial: they have regarded this life and its lures to be their real objective.

ذَٰلِكَ مَبْلَغُهُمْ مِّنَ الْعِلْمِ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ هُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِمَن ضَلَّ عَنْ سَبِيلِهِ وَهُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِمَن اهْتَدَى (٣٠)²⁰

The implication of this verse is that these people only have access to

18. Al-Tabrayzī, *Dīwān al-ḥamāsah*, vol. 2 (Beirut: Dār al-Qalam, n.d.), 182.

19. Therefore, turn away from those who turn away from Our Reminder and seek only the life of this world.

20. This is the farthest limit of their knowledge. Your Lord best knows those who have strayed from His path and those who are rightly guided.

the apparent and the external form of this world; neither do they have access to the reality behind this external form nor do they have any desire for it even though it is the latter which should have been their prime consideration; without it, this world is meaningless and purposeless and a place of amusement. The fact of the matter, on the other hand, is that so evident from every nook and corner of this universe is its creator's power and authority that except for a fool no one can be audacious enough to deny it. It is beyond a powerful and wise being that He create such a huge place merely for amusement.

It is evident from the style of *ذَلِكَ مَبْلَغُهُمْ مِنَ الْعِلْمِ* that it is merely their narrow mindedness and meanness that they are lured by its external form and have become indifferent to its reality even though all its apparent pleasures are temporary and transient. The real eternal kingdom is the one towards which the Qur'ān calls them but they because of their timidity and deprivation do not find the courage to go after it. This aspect is explained by the following verse of Sūrah Rūm:

يَعْلَمُونَ ظَاهِرًا مِّنَ الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَهُمْ عَنِ الْآخِرَةِ هُمْ غَافِلُونَ (٧:٣٠)

They know the outward show of this nether life, but of the life to come they are heedless. (30:7)

The words *إِنَّ رَبَّكَ هُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِمَن ضَلَّ عَنْ سَبِيلِهِ وَهُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِمَن اهْتَدَى* assure the Prophet (sws) and warn and threaten the people who are slaves to the pleasures of this world. The Prophet (sws) is addressed and told that he should now ignore them; his Lord fully knows those who have deviated from His path as well as those who are rightly guided. He will deal with every person the way he is worthy of being dealt with. His knowledge embraces every thing and His power dominates all. Neither will those people who have strayed from the right path be able to escape His grasp nor will those who are fighting every misery for His cause be deprived of His help and mercy.

Section III: (Verses 31-53)

The succeeding verses further explain and emphasize what is stated in the previous section.

First, it is explained that the kingdom of the heavens and the earth is under the control of the one and only God. He has not granted any share of His power to their self-claimed deities so as to be able to influence His justice. Thus He will necessarily punish the sinners and reward the

righteous. As far as those people are concerned who, because of their intercessors or because of their lineage and race or because of some apparent service to the House of God and its pilgrims were guilty of self-praise and regarded Paradise to be their birth-right, they shall be cast into Hell by God. Only those will be safe from His grasp who desisted from usurping rights and from open indecencies. If they chance by a sin, they will be forgiven by God once they repent. Vast is God's mercy. Those who in conceit of their superiority and holiness think that whatever their deeds God will not seize them should keep in mind the fact that the Almighty knows best the material from which they have been created; a creature made from mud, sludge and an impure fluid should not claim to be so holy and sacred.

After this, wonder is expressed at the people who overrate themselves and who do not have it in their hearts to spend in the way of God but in their claim of association with Abraham (sws) or Moses (sws) dream that they will surely be granted a high status in the Hereafter even though the most prominent teaching of Abraham (sws) and Moses (sws) was that in the Hereafter no one will bear the burden of another person; each person will face what his own deeds have earned for him.

After this is explained that sorrow and happiness, life and death, subsistence and children, affluence and poverty are all under the control of God and therefore everyone must turn to Him at all times. Those who worship the Sirius star which comes out in the spring season thinking that the blessings of spring are the result of its bestowal should remember that God is the Lord of Sirius as well.

After the above previous nations are briefly referred to in that they too were led astray the way the Quraysh were; so they should seek a lesson from their fate recorded in history and not invite the wrath of God.

In the light of this background, readers may recite the verses cited below.

Text and Translation

وَلِلَّهِ مَا فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ لِيَجْزِيَ الَّذِينَ أَسَاءُوا بِمَا عَمِلُوا وَيَجْزِيَ الَّذِينَ أَحْسَنُوا بِالْحُسْنَى (٣١) الَّذِينَ يَجْتَنِبُونَ كَبَائِرَ الْإِثْمِ وَالْفَوَاحِشَ إِلَّا اللَّمَمَ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ وَاسِعُ الْمَغْفِرَةِ هُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِكُمْ إِذْ أَنْشَأَكُمْ مِنَ الْأَرْضِ وَإِذْ أَنْتُمْ أَجْنَتُمْ فِي بُطُونِ أُمَّهَاتِكُمْ فَلَا تُزَكُّوا أَنْفُسَكُمْ هُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِمَنِ اتَّقَى (٣٢) أَفَرَأَيْتَ الَّذِي تَوَلَّى (٣٣) وَأَعْطَى قَلِيلًا وَأَكْدَى (٣٤) أَعِنْدَهُ عِلْمُ الْغَيْبِ فَهُوَ يَرَى (٣٥) أَمْ لَمْ يُنَبَّأْ بِمَا فِي صُحُفِ مُوسَى (٣٦) وَإِبْرَاهِيمَ الَّذِي وَفَّى (٣٧) أَلَا تَزِرُ وَازِرَةٌ وِزْرَ أُخْرَى (٣٨) وَأَنْ لَّيْسَ لِلْإِنْسَانِ إِلَّا مَا سَعَى

(٣٩) وَأَنَّ سَعْيَهُ سَوْفَ يُرَى (٤٠) ثُمَّ يُجْزَاهُ الْجَزَاءَ الْأَوْفَى (٤١) وَأَنَّ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ الْمُنْتَهَى (٤٢)
 وَأَنَّهُ هُوَ أَضْحَكَ وَأَبْكَى (٤٣) وَأَنَّهُ هُوَ أَمَاتَ وَأَحْيَا (٤٤) وَأَنَّهُ خَلَقَ الزَّوْجَيْنِ الذَّكَرَ
 وَالْأُنثَى (٤٥) مِنْ نُطْقَةٍ إِذَا تُمْنَى (٤٦) وَأَنَّ عَلَيْهِ النَّشْأَةَ الْأُخْرَى (٤٧) وَأَنَّهُ هُوَ أَغْنَى
 وَأَقْنَى (٤٨) وَأَنَّهُ هُوَ رَبُّ الشَّعْرَى (٤٩) وَأَنَّهُ أَهْلَكَ عَادًا الْأُولَى (٥٠) وَنَمُودَ فَمَا أَبْقَى (٥١)
 وَقَوْمَ نُوحٍ مِّن قَبْلُ إِنَّهُمْ كَانُوا هُمْ أَظْلَمَ وَأَطْعَى (٥٢) وَالْمُؤْتَفِكَةَ أَهْوَى (٥٣) فَغَشَّاهَا مَا
 غَشَّى (٥٤) فَبِأَيِّ آلَاءِ رَبِّكَ تَتَمَارَى (٥٥)

And whatever is in the heavens and in this earth is in the jurisdiction of Allah so that He punish the evil-doers for their deeds and bestow a good reward on those who did good deeds – those who used to abstain from heinous sins and open indecencies save those occasional yet minor sins to which they were induced. Indeed, your Lord is vast in mercy. He knows you fairly well from the time when He created you from the earth and when you were a foetus in your mothers' wombs. Therefore, ascribe not purity to yourselves. He knows very well the pious. (31-32)

Did you see the one who turned his back, gave a little and then held back? Has he the knowledge of the Unseen; thus he is seeing it. Does he not know what is in the Scriptures of Moses and of Abraham – who fulfilled all his promises; it is in the Scriptures that no soul shall bear another's burden and that a man shall only receive that which he strove and that what he has earned shall soon be shown to him; he shall then be fully rewarded and that all things shall in the end return to Allah. (33-42)

And that, indeed, it is He Who makes [people] laugh and makes [them] weep, and it is He Who gives death and He Who gives life and it is He Who created the two spouses the male and the female from a drop when it is poured forth and that upon Him is the second bringing forth and that it is He who bestowed and enriched and it is He who is the Lord of Sirius as well. (43-49)

And it is He who destroyed the ancient 'Ād and the Thamud also, thus sparing no one, and before them the people of Noah also. Indeed, they were very unjust and rebellious, and [He] also routed the overthrown cities. Thus there covered them that which did cover them. Now, which of your Lord's marvels will you deny! (50-55)

Explanation

وَلِلَّهِ مَا فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ لِيَجْزِيَ الَّذِينَ أَسَاءُوا بِمَا عَمِلُوا وَيَجْزِيَ الَّذِينَ

أَحْسِنُوا بِالْخُسْئِ (٣١)²¹

Mentioned here is the consequence of the refutation of polytheism and intercession done in the earlier verses: the dominion of the heavens and the earth is in the hands of God. No one has a share in them that he may challenge the authority of God in them or that someone may interfere with His intentions or influence His decisions.

The letter ل in يَجْزِي is to not to state the cause but to state the consequence. The implication is that when He alone is the only master and controller, then the obvious corollary of this is that those who are relying on their self-styled and self-claimed deities are only deceiving their own selves. God is wise and just. He will definitely punish the sinners and there is no one who can save them from God's grasp. Similarly, He will necessarily richly reward the pious and the virtuous and to receive this reward they will absolutely not be required to ask for the intercession of anyone.

It is evident from this verse that the sinners will only see exactly the evils they had committed and God will not make any addition to this. On the other hand, the righteous will not be merely rewarded for their virtues; God will bless them further with His favours. God is just and thus will not be unjust to anyone; however, He is also gracious and thus will bless His righteous people with more than what they deserve.

الَّذِينَ يَحْتَنِبُونَ كَبَائِرَ الْإِثْمِ وَالْفَوَاحِشَ إِلَّا اللَّمَمَ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ وَاسِعُ الْمَغْفِرَةِ هُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِكُمْ إِذْ أَنْشَأَكُمْ مِنَ الْأَرْضِ وَإِذْ أَنْتُمْ أَجِنَّةٌ فِي بُطُونِ أُمَّهَاتِكُمْ فَلَا تُزَكُّوا أَنْفُسَكُمْ هُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِمَنِ اتَّقَى (٣٢)²²

The verse says that if any sin emanates from people who abstain from heinous sins and acts of open lewdness, then it is as if they get entangled with filth while treading the terrain of life. They may stumble into sin; however, just as a person who has a proclivity for cleanliness can never dwell in dirt and tries to come out of it as soon as is possible for him, in a similar manner these people too do not live in sin; they try to cleanse

21. And whatever is in the heavens and in this earth is within the jurisdiction of Allah so that He punish the evil-doers for their deeds and bestow a good reward on those who did good deeds –

22. Those who used to abstain from heinous sins and open indecencies save those occasional yet minor sins to which they were induced. Indeed, your Lord is vast in mercy. He knows you fairly well from the time when He created you from the earth and when you were a foetus in your mothers' wombs. Therefore, ascribe not purity to yourselves. He knows very well the pious.

themselves as soon as a sin is committed by repenting and reforming themselves.

The words ألمّام and لم mean to stay at place for a short period. The meaning of لم ascribed to Mujāhid and Ibn ‘Abbās (rta)²³ is that a person stumbles into a sin but then soon comes out of this state. What is meant is that it is not required of a person to lead a sinless life. A person may at times while succumbing to emotions and desires commit a sin; however, God requires of him that he should have such a vigilant sense of faith in him that a sin should not embrace his life so much that it becomes difficult for him to leave it; such should be the level of this vigilance that when a person trips into a sin, he reforms himself as soon as he realizes it. God will forgive people who lead such lives; vast is His mercy.

In Sūrah Nisā’ this subject is discussed in the following words:

إِنَّمَا التَّوْبَةُ عَلَى اللَّهِ لِلَّذِينَ يَعْمَلُونَ السُّوءَ بِجَهَالَةٍ ثُمَّ يَتُوبُونَ مِنْ قَرِيبٍ فَأُولَٰئِكَ يَتُوبُ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِمْ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ عَلِيمًا حَكِيمًا وَلَيْسَتِ التَّوْبَةُ لِلَّذِينَ يَعْمَلُونَ السَّيِّئَاتِ حَتَّىٰ إِذَا حَضَرَ أَحَدَهُمُ الْمَوْتُ قَالَ إِنِّي تُبْتُ الْآنَ وَلَا الَّذِينَ يَمُوتُونَ وَهُمْ كُفَّارٌ أُولَٰئِكَ أَعْتَدْنَا لَهُمْ عَذَابًا أَلِيمًا (٤: ١٧-١٨)

God’s responsibility is to forgive only those who commit a sin while being overwhelmed with emotions and then quickly repent. It is they who are forgiven by God. God is all-knowing and wise. But He does not forgive those who sin all their lives and, when death comes to them, say: “Now I repent!” nor those who die as disbelievers. It is for these whom We have prepared a grievous punishment. (4:17-18)

In the expression الَّذِينَ يَجْتَنِبُونَ كَبَائِرَ الْإِثْمِ وَالْفَوَاحِشِ the word إِثْمِ refers to sins which relate to usurpation of rights, oppression and injustice and the word فَوَاحِشِ refers to open indecencies and sexual transgressions. If Muslims are urged to desist from major sins, then this does not mean that they will not be held unaccountable for the minor ones. As explained at relevant places of this *tafsīr*, this only means that so strong is the sense of faith of people who safeguard themselves from major sins that they never remain adamant on minor ones. How can a person who can be safely trusted with thousands remain content on being called a dishonest person in the case of small amounts.

The verse sounds a warning to people who were contaminated with all

23. Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-bayān ‘an tā’wīl āy al-Qur’ān*, vol. 27 (Beirut: Dār al-fikr, 1405 AH), 66.

sorts of sins and sexual transgressions but dreamt of ending up in Paradise on the basis of the intercession of their alleged deities and on the basis of nobility of their forefathers and the superiority of their race. They are told that what is going to be of avail to them before God is faith and righteous deeds and not this false support.

It has been referred to earlier in this *tafsīr* that both the Quraysh and the People of the Book were inflicted with some sort of false notion or the other. Besides their deities, the Quraysh had great pride in their lineage as well as on their custodianship of the House of God. They were the progeny of Abraham (sws) and Ishmael (sws). Because of their pride on their custodianship of the House of God, they were warned by the Qur'ān in the following words:

أَجَعَلْتُمْ سِقَايَةَ الْحَاجِّ وَعِمَارَةَ الْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ كَمَنْ آمَنَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ وَجَاهَدَ
فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ (١٩:٩)

Did you regard providing water to the pilgrims and managing the Sacred Mosque equivalent to the deed of the people who believed in God and the Last Day, and fought for God's cause? (9:19)

They are told that though providing water to the pilgrims and looking after the House of God is a noble deed, yet this cannot take the place of embracing faith and doing righteous deeds nor one which can conceal their crimes. Similarly, the People of the Book conceitedly thought that since they were the chosen people and were the descendents of Abraham (sws) and Isaac (sws), the fire of Hell would not touch them. In the first place, they would not even be cast into Hell and if someone among them had to bear it, then that too would only be for a few days. Eternal punishment was not for them in any case; such punishment was reserved only for other nations. It is on this conceited behaviour of theirs that Jesus (sws) had admonished them that they not show conceit on being the progeny of Abraham (sws) and that if his Lord wanted, he could create Abraham's progeny from stones.²⁴ It was while following the footsteps of these Jews that Muslims too regarded themselves to be forgiven people and had thereby absolved themselves of all the responsibilities related to faith and deeds. The matter reached the extent that there were many families among them in which if a person was born in was thought to be guaranteed Paradise and there were many graveyards in which if a person was buried was regarded to be worthy of the eternal kingdom regardless of his beliefs and deeds.

24. See, for example: Matthew, 3:9.

In the section of the verse: *هُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِكُمْ إِذْ أَنْشَأَكُمْ مِنَ الْأَرْضِ وَإِذْ أَنْتُمْ أَجِنَّةٌ فِي بُطُونِ أُمَّهَاتِكُمْ فَلَا تُزَكُّوا أَنْفُسَكُمْ هُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِمَنِ اتَّقَى* all people who have this mentality are addressed and warned that they should not regard themselves to be holy and indulge in self-praise. God knows most the period of their lives in which He created them from the earth and also the period in which they remained in the form of embryos in the wombs of their mothers. The implication is that it is not befitting for a creature created from mud, mire and water and then nurtured in the womb after a lowly fluid is poured forth into it regard itself to be worthy of high status and absolve itself of treading the path of righteousness and virtue. Every person knows that he was created from a very despicable fluid and was initially raised in the constricted tract of His mother's womb. For this reason, he should not expect himself to be regarded superior merely on the basis of his physical form. Any status he can acquire can only be on the basis of faith and virtue and it is God who has the most knowledge of this. It is He who will measure things by His scale and grant each person the status he deserves. Before this assessment is made, no one has the right to proclaim his high status to other people. This subject will also be discussed in verses thirty eight and thirty nine of Sūrah Ma'ārij. Inshāllah, a further explanation will be furnished in them.

The degrading way in which human existence is mentioned in this verse needs to be kept in consideration as well as the scorn on a person's claim to holiness and superiority in the words *فَلَا تُزَكُّوا أَنْفُسَكُمْ*. After this, one should deliberate on the beliefs of *wahdat al-wujūd* of our Sufis as per which man is a part of God and will one day merge into Him and in this manner a drop by merging into an ocean will become an ocean. If man is really a part of God, then did the Almighty refer to one His parts, God forbid, in such a degrading way in this verse?

Then further deliberation is needed on the fact that regarding one self as superior merely because of physical form has been regarded as self-praise by God while, on the other hand, these Sufis chant: *سبحاني سبحاني ما أعظم شاني* (I am pure and flawless! What majesty I have! Exalted is my majesty).²⁵ Can a person who has even an iota of faith in him make this highly arrogant and supercilious claim about his self? However, since the Sufis instead of receiving guidance from the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth have received it from the *bātaniyyah*, extremist Shiites and the Brahmans are guilty of introducing their evil creed into Islam and there are so many foolish people who repeat these sentences even though they are totally

25. See, for example: Abū al-Farj 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn 'Alī ibn Muḥammad, *Talbīs-i Iblīs*, 1st ed. (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī, 1405 AH), 417.

unaware of their meanings.

أَفَرَأَيْتَ الَّذِي تَوَلَّى (٣٣) وَأَعْطَى قَلِيلًا وَأَكْدَى (٣٤) أَعِنْدَهُ عِلْمُ الْغَيْبِ فَهُوَ يَرَى (٣٥)²⁶

Here the Almighty has portrayed the character of people who do not have the courage to spend in His cause and if ever they do give something it is in a perfunctory manner, yet claim that they will be granted a high status by Him in the Hereafter. Do they have a telescope which is capable of seeing the matters of the unseen world through which they can observe the high rank and status which have been reserved for them?

Our exegetes generally regard الَّذِي to be a reference to Walīd ibn Muḡhīrah,²⁷ a chief of the Quraysh tribe. They also relate an incident about him saying that he had expressed his intention to embrace Islam but when one of his companions came to know of this intention he was told by this companion not to if he was embracing the faith because of fear for the Hereafter. He told him that if he deposited a certain amount of money with him, he would ensure saving him from the danger of the Hereafter; on this assurance, Walīd gave up his plan to embrace Islam and promised him to pay the said amount; however, later on, after giving him some part of the amount refused to pay the rest.

Though this incident has been cited by all our exegetes, in the first place it does not have a sound chain of narration, and if it is supposed that this incident is true, even then one fails to comprehend its relationship with these verses. If it is supposed that Walīd did not fulfil his promise, then has the Qurʾān rebuked him here for not fulfilling his promise?

The fact of the matter is that since the word الَّذِي generally qualifies a proper noun, wherever our exegetes find الَّذِي or الَّتِي, they start looking for a person whom these words qualify. In this quest, they have to make up an incident however inapt and unrelated to the occasion and context of the discourse it may be.

I have presented many examples in this *tafsīr* to show that الَّتِي or الَّذِي at all places do not refer to a specific man or woman; at certain instances, they are used to portray a parable too. At such instances, the purpose is to present the collective character of a group; however, it is portrayed in a specific form to people. I would here refer to one of the examples which can be seen in the previous *sūrah*s. Consider the following verse of Sūrah Naḥl: وَلَا تَكُونُوا كَالَّذِي نَقَضَتْ غَزْلَهَا مِنْ بَعْدِ قُوَّةٍ أَنْكَاثًا (٩٢:١٦) (do not, like the

26. Did you see the one who turned his back, gave a little and then held back. Has he the knowledge of the Unseen; thus he is seeing it.

27. See for example: Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, vol. 27, 70.

woman who unravels the thread she has firmly spun, (16:92)). One can see the word *الَّتِي* is mentioned; however, it does not refer to a specific old lady so that one may start investigating her name, family and whereabouts and to find out about how she was making yarn from cotton and why would she undo what she had made; all these efforts are needless because the reference here is not to a specific old lady; it is to a supposed symbolic character.

In a similar manner, a hypothetical character is portrayed to the Idolaters of Arabia. These Idolaters did not have the courage to spend in the cause of God but on the basis of intercession of their self-claimed deities and due to conceit of their racial superiority claimed that just as they had a high status in this world, they would be blessed with this same status in the Hereafter if ever it came. In the mirror of this portrayal, Walīd ibn Mughīrah and Abu Jahl as well as other miserly yet affluent people of the Quraysh could see their own faces. They were the ones who would desist from responding to the calls of the Prophet (sws) to spend for the cause of God but would think that they had the keys of Paradise in their control.

The style of the discourse in these verses is disparaging and sarcastic: Look at these foolish people who run away from spending in the cause of God; even if they do so out of shame, then too it is in a perfunctory manner but claim that they will be given a high status in the Hereafter; in other words, it is as if they are able to see even from this world the affluence and luxury they will be given in Paradise.

The word *أَكْدَى* is from the idiom *أَكْدَى الْخَافِرِ* which means that such a big rock was encountered by a digger that breaking it was difficult for him. Portrayed here is the general attitude of the miserly: if they spend out of compulsion, they spend very little and at that time are overcome by stinginess so much that they clench their fists and if anyone tries to urge them to spend, they launch an onslaught on him and remark: how much should we spend; get aside; I have already squandered a lot of money for this purpose. The verse: *يَقُولُ أَهْلَكْتُ مَالًا لُبَدًا* (90:6) (I have wasted heaps of money, (90:6)) portrays the character of such stingy people.

أَمْ لَمْ يُنَبِّأْ بِمَا فِي صُحُفِ مُوسَى (٣٦) وَإِبْرَاهِيمَ الَّذِي وَفَّى (٣٧) أَلَا تَرَى وَازِرَةً وَرَرَ
أُخْرَى (٣٨)²⁸

The implication of these verses is that these people are dreaming of

28. Does he not know what is in the Scriptures of Moses and of Abraham – who befittingly passed every test he was put in; it is in the Scriptures that no soul shall bear another's burden

ending up in Paradise relying merely on the intercession of their alleged deities; have not the teachings of the scriptures of Moses (sws) and Abraham (sws) reached them that in the Hereafter no soul shall bear the burden of another?

Here it needs to be kept in consideration that the addressees here are primarily the Quraysh and secondarily the People of the Book. The latter claimed to be the followers of both Abraham (sws) and Moses (sws); similarly, the former regarded Abraham (sws) to be an elder of their family and their religious leader. For this reason both these great messengers of God are mentioned with great emphasis.

The Prophet Abraham (sws) is referred to by the attribute الَّذِي وَفَّى which means that he followed every directive of God in letter and in spirit and fulfilled his promise and who passed every test and trial in an outstanding way. In Sūrah Baqarah, the words are: وَإِذْ ابْتَلَىٰ إِبْرَاهِيمَ رَبُّهُ (بِكَلِمَاتٍ فَأَتَمَّهُنَّ) (2:124) (and recall when Abraham was put to trial by His Lord in a few things and he fulfilled all of them, (2:124)). The purpose of mentioning this attribute of Abraham (sws) to both the Quraysh and the People of the Book is to admonish them that the high status achieved by Abraham (sws) in this world and in the next was the result of showing complete obedience and faithfulness to God. On the other hand, their state of affairs is that without being obedient to God they want to win high favours merely because they are his descendents.

Here a question arises about the scripture of Abraham (sws) which this verse alludes to. The answer to this question is that he did not have a scripture in the formal sense of the term. All his teachings were transmitted orally as traditions to both branches of his progeny. They were kept more intact amongst the Israelites because prophets of God kept coming to them. The Ishmaelites were unlettered and for this reason they became very hazy about these traditions. Later on when the Torah was compiled, the history and teachings of Abraham (sws) were also collected in it. Though the Jews altered many of these teachings to suit their own interest to which we have alluded in the *tafsīr* of previous *sūrahs*, yet his basic teachings which are referred to here are still found in the Torah. For this reason, if by the scriptures of Abraham (sws) the reference is to the ones in which his teachings are mentioned, then this ascription would be absolutely correct.

The words أَلَا تَزِرُ وَازِرَةٌ وِزْرَ أُخْرَى refer to the teaching which is present in the scriptures of Moses (sws) and Abraham (sws) that in the Hereafter no soul shall carry the burden of another; each will carry its own burden. This in fact is a refutation of the baseless concept of intercession which is the subject of this *sūrah*. This teaching is mentioned in the Torah and the Injil at so many instances that one wonders how in their presence the

recipients of these Books were led away by Satan into polytheism. I have cited references to this teaching at a number of places in this *tafsīr* and repeating them here is not needed.

وَأَنْ لَّيْسَ لِلْإِنْسَانِ إِلَّا مَا سَعَى (٣٩) وَأَنَّ سَعْيَهُ سَوْفَ يُرَى (٤٠) ثُمَّ يُجْزَاهُ الْجَزَاءُ الْأَوْفَى (٤١)²⁹

These verses further explain what is said previously: a person will only be rewarded in the Hereafter for what he himself did; no soul will be rewarded for the virtues of another or punished for the misdeeds of someone else. The implication is that if their forefathers were very pious, then they alone shall be rewarded for this piety; the reward of their forefathers will not be transferred to them so that by virtue of it they end up in Paradise. This principle is stated thus in Sūrah Baqarah: تِلْكَ أُمَّةٌ قَدْ خَلَتْ لَهَا مَا كَسَبَتْ وَلَكُمْ مَا كَسَبْتُمْ (٢: ١٣٤) (that was a community which has passed away. They will get what they earned and you will get what you earn, (2:134)). If in lieu of the deeds done by a pious father, his children could go to Paradise then who could have been more pious than Noah (sws); however, in spite of Noah's prayer, the Almighty did not spare his son. Similarly, Abraham (sws) dubbed as *khalīlullāh* (the friend of God) prayed for his father but this prayer too was not accepted. The wife of Lot (sws) was indeed the wife of a great prophet of God but so unbiased is the law of God that even this relationship to a prophet could of no benefit to her. On the other hand, the wife of the Pharaoh was the wife of a great enemy of God; however, in Sūrah Tahrim (66:11), God has showered great praise on her. The relationships of father and son and husband and wife are the closest and most loving. No one can be closer to God than his prophets; however, as can be seen from these examples that even the closest relations of a prophet whose record was devoid of good deeds were not able to benefit from this relationship not to speak of others.

A person can benefit from the good deeds of another person in the Hereafter in two forms: firstly, this good deed should be based on a person's affectionate relationship of faith with another person: for example, if a believer prays to God for another believer, it is hoped that this prayer will be answered. Secondly, the person has some direct or indirect role in that good deed: for example, a believer taught a believer or became an exemplar of a teaching for the other person or had financially helped the other person in some way. If there is such a role of a person in the good deed of another person, then this is as if that person too had a share in earning it and is like a deed from which he too will benefit.

29. And that a man shall only receive that which he strove and that what he has earned shall soon be shown to him; he shall then be fully rewarded.

Some people having a socialistic mentality are of the opinion that here the Qur'ān acknowledges the principle that a person should earn what is commensurate to the work he put in. This interpretation has absolutely no relationship with the occasion and context of the verse and is in fact a wrong use of one's intelligence. For this reason I do not want to deal here with an issue which has no bearing to the verse. However, in the *tafsīr* of the previous *sūrahs*, I have dealt in detail with the basic philosophy of socialism, and will *inshallāh* also explain some of its aspects at appropriate places of the coming *sūrahs*. This much, however, should be kept in consideration here that the system of this world is based on trials and tests and in the next world issues will be settled on the basis of justice and rewards. A person has not been granted anything here because of the work he has put in to earn it; on the other hand, He has blessed some abundantly and some stringently and in this manner tested the gratefulness and patience of both. In the Hereafter, people who pass this trial will be rewarded for their good deeds and those who do not will be deprived of any reward; this failure of theirs will take them to Hell because in the Hereafter, the abode of such unsuccessful people is Hell.

The words وَأَنَّ سَعْيُهُ سَوْفَ يُرَىٰ ثُمَّ يُجْزَاهُ الْجَزَاءُ الْأَوْفَىٰ sound a warning that no one should deceive himself that what is said above is baseless: soon what a person has earned will come to the notice of God and then he will be duly rewarded or punished. These words are an assurance for the believers and a warning to those who disbelieve in the reward and punishment of the Hereafter: the believers should rest assured that the smallest of their good deeds shall be taken notice of and the disbelievers should remain aware that their smallest of evil deeds shall not be ignored.

وَأَنَّ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ الْمُنتَهَىٰ (٤٢)³⁰

The implication of this verse is that it should remain clear that everyone will end up with God. No one should remain under the misconception that he has some other being to whom he can turn so that he be saved from accountability before God or that being will be able to appeal against the decisions of God. Everyone will be brought before God and all decisions of God will be final and irrevocable.

وَأَنَّهُ هُوَ أَضْحَكَ وَأَبْكَى (٤٣) وَأَنَّهُ هُوَ أَمَاتَ وَأَحْيَا (٤٤) وَأَنَّهُ خَلَقَ الزَّوْجَيْنِ الذَّكَرَ

30. And that all things shall in the end return to Allah.

وَالْأُنثَى (٤٥) مِنْ نُطْفَةٍ إِذَا تُمْنَى (٤٦) وَأَنَّ عَلَيْهِ النَّشَأَ الْآخِرَى (٤٧)³¹

Mentioned in these verses is the reason because of which God is the Lord of everyone: it is in His authority to make someone laugh or cry; in other words, it is only He Who creates the circumstances for joy and only He Who creates the circumstances for sorrow. Happiness and sadness are solely under His control. Grief and anguish and harm and benefit are under His sole authority. If this is so, then on what basis can someone else become the Lord of people?

Similarly, it is only in God's authority to grant life and death. So if no one has any say or authority in giving life or death, then what is the basis of regarding someone other than God as the Lord?

It is God Who has created the members of a pair: man and woman. It is not that the man was created by someone and woman by someone else. Similarly, it is not that sons are granted by someone and daughters by someone else. So when there is no such possibility of such division, then what is the sense in regarding someone else as Lord.

Man and woman are created by a drop of fluid which is poured forth. After this is done, no one knows what will happen to it as far as its growth and development are concerned. No one knows whether it will produce a boy or a girl, whether it will produce something at all or will remain incomplete. The looks and form of the human being ultimately formed are also not in the knowledge of any person. All these details are only known to the great creator Who has knowledge of all things and Who nurtures this fluid within multifarious layers and brings it forth in the form of a child after a specific time period. He then is responsible for the growth and development of this child which may be a boy or a girl. They mature into a man and a woman. When all this is only in God's control, then what is the meaning of requesting someone else to grant children?

The words وَأَنَّ عَلَيْهِ النَّشَأَ الْآخِرَى refer to the fact that when it is God alone Who creates every one from a drop of fluid, then will it be difficult for Him to recreate them? Not only the possibility of this recreation is obvious but also the need for it to happen is also obvious so that God's justice and mercy can completely manifest themselves. So when both these things are obvious, the wisdom of God necessitates that He bring forth a day when everyone be raised to life again – a day on which He evaluates their good and evil deeds and rewards and punishes them accordingly.

31. And that, indeed, it is He Who makes [people] laugh and makes [them] weep, and it is He Who gives death and He Who gives life and it is He Who created the two spouses the male and the female from a drop when it is poured forth and that upon Him is the second bringing forth.

All these points with slight variations are present in the declaration of acquittal made by Abraham (sws) against his people when he left them. This declaration is mentioned in Sūrah Shu‘arā’ in the following words:

الَّذِي خَلَقَنِي فَهُوَ يَهْدِينِ وَالَّذِي هُوَ يُطْعِمُنِي وَيَسْقِينِ وَإِذَا مَرِضْتُ فَهُوَ يَشْفِينِ
وَالَّذِي يُمِيتُنِي ثُمَّ يُحْيِينِ وَالَّذِي أَطْمَعُ أَنْ يَغْفِرَ لِي خَطِيئَتِي يَوْمَ الدِّينِ (٢٦: ٧٨-٨٢)

Who has created me; then he guides me and provides me with food and drink; who, when I am sick, makes me healthy; who will cause me to die and then bring me back to life; who, I hope, will forgive me my sins on the Day of Judgement. (26:78-82)

وَأَنَّهُ هُوَ أَغْنَىٰ وَأَقْنَىٰ (٤٨) وَأَنَّهُ هُوَ رَبُّ الشَّعْرَىٰ (٤٩)³²

It is God alone Who transforms a person’s state of poverty to one in which his needs are fulfilled and from whomsoever He wants, He blesses him with so much more than his needs that he becomes a wealthy person. The word أَقْنَىٰ is from قَنِية which is used for accumulated wealth. So the word أَغْنَىٰ is used for those people who have come out of their state of poverty, and أَقْنَىٰ is used for people who have not merely come out of their state of poverty, but for those who have become affluent. In verses thirty three and thirty four above, the character of those rich people is referred to who, though they do not spend in the cause of God, dream of high ranks in Paradise. This verse actually admonishes such people that the wealth and riches they have are from God. They are not from Sirius the star as they reckon. It is God Who is the Lord of Sirius too.

Sirius appears in the spring season. The Idolaters of Arabia regarded it to be very blessed and would attribute the lushness of spring as well as their own trade activities to it. A poet of the age of ignorance while praising a praiseworthy person says:

شامس في القر حتى اذا ما

ذكت الشعري فبرد وظل

(He brings heat to people in cool winters and when Sirius appears [in the spring season], he becomes a source of coolness and shade for people).³³

32. And that it is He who bestowed and enriched and it is He who is the Lord of Sirius as well.

33. Al-Tabrayzī, *Dīwān al-ḥamāsah*, vol. 1, 343.

Here, one needs to keep in consideration, the discussion found in the very first verse of this *sūrah*: these stars which these foolish people think as the carvers of their fortune bear witness through their own setting and falling that only God is their Lord.

It is not necessary that all the things mentioned above be referenced in the scriptures of Moses (sws) and Abraham (sws); they are extensions to the original. There are several examples in the Qur'ān in which a statement is cited and then certain additions are made in it which though are not part of the statement yet are based on it. This explains the whole scenario and the discourse is brought in accordance with the circumstances. In my opinion, this has what happened here as well. From verse forty onwards, the discourse forms an extension which has made it a comment on the Quraysh as well.

وَأَنَّهُ أَهْلَكَ عَادًا الْأُولَىٰ (٥٠) وَثَمُودَ فَمَا أَبْقَىٰ (٥١) وَقَوْمَ نُوحٍ مِّن قَبْلُ إِنَّهُمْ كَانُوا هُمْ أَظْلَمَ
وَأَطْعَىٰ (٥٢)³⁴

These verses are also part of the extended discourse. By citing historical references, the Quraysh are warned that just as today they are being warned, in a similar manner the peoples of the 'Ād and the Thamūd from among this land were also warned by their respective messengers and before them the people of Noah (sws) too. However, these people paid no heed to these warnings. At last all of them were destroyed by the Almighty and no one from among them remained. The implication is that the Quraysh too will meet the same fate if they follow in their footsteps. The law of God is equal for all; their own history bears reference to this. The 'Ād here are called as the ancient or the first 'Ād. The reason for this is that the Thamūd were their descendents and were also known as the second 'Ād.

The words إِنَّهُمْ كَانُوا هُمْ أَظْلَمَ وَأَطْعَى do not merely relate to the people of Noah (sws). They also relate to the 'Ād and the Thamūd. The destruction they faced was not because God was unjust to them; on the contrary, it was because they were unjust to their own souls and were a very rebellious people. The implication is that the real reasons for the destruction of a nation are not external; they arise from within it and take the form of earthquakes, floods and storms and at times manifest themselves as attacks from an enemy.

34. And it is He who destroyed the ancient 'Ād and the Thamud also, thus sparing no one, and before them the people of Noah also. Indeed, they were very unjust and rebellious.

وَالْمُؤْتَفِكَةَ أَهْوَى (٥٣) فَغَشَّاهَا مَا غَشَّى (٥٤)³⁵

This is a reference to the people of Lot. The word مُؤْتَفِكَةٌ is explained thus in the *Lisān al-‘arab*:

The مُؤْتَفِكَاتٌ refer to those winds which totally turn a place topsy turvy the way a harvester turns a cultivated land topsy turvy. When a new flood comes and it deposits a layer of mud and sand on the earth, then this too is called مُؤْتَفِكَةٌ. Analogously, the tempestuous wind which covers the earth with pebbles and sand is also called مُؤْتَفِكَةٌ.³⁶

The Almighty unleashed on the people of Lot a dust-laden wind which after picking up speed became a pebble-hurling wind (*hāṣib*). As a result, at first, pebbles and stones rained down on them and then the wind became so strong that it overturned buildings. While referring to the fate of the people of Lot (sws), the Qur’an has said: (٤٠:٢٩) فَمِنْهُمْ مَنْ أَرْسَلْنَا عَلَيْهِ حَاصِبًا (on some, We sent down a stone-hurling wind, (29:40)). At another instance, the words are: (٧٤:١٥) فَجَعَلْنَا عَلَيْهِمْ حِجَابًا مِّنْ سِجِّيلٍ (We turned this settlement upside down, and We rained upon them stones of clay, (15:74)).

I have explained the style adopted in فَغَشَّاهَا مَا غَشَّى at a number of places. It is used to portray a situation which is beyond words. The implication is that it was covered with something which is beyond words.

فَبِأَيِّ آلَاءِ رَبِّكَ تَتَمَارَى (٥٥)³⁷

The Quraysh are addressed here. Though the pronoun is in the singular, yet the whole community is addressed. When a community is addressed in the singular in this manner, the purpose is to warn each and every individual belonging to it. This is the case here as well. Each and every disbeliever is addressed and told that these arguments which substantiate reward and punishment are before them. They are drawn from both reason and revelation, from the scriptures of Moses (sws) and Abraham (sws) and from the history of the nations related to them. So how many a sign of their Lord will they deny and how much will they dispute with Him?

The word آلَاء is the plural of إِلَٰ. Our exegetes have generally

35. And [He] also routed the overthrown cities. Thus there covered them that which did cover them.

36. Muḥammad ibn Mukarram ibn Manzūr, *Lisān al-‘arab*, 1st ed., vol. 10 (Beirut: Dār ṣādir, n.d.), 391.

37. Now, which of your Lord’s marvels will you deny!

interpreted it to mean “favours and blessings”; however, this is an incomplete meaning of the word. Its real meaning is miracles, signs, marvels of nature, feats, relics and signs of wisdom. Since favours and blessings also come under these, they are also regarded to be its meaning; nevertheless, at every place, it is not proper to translate this word in this sense because like favours the signs of favours are also included in the meaning of this word. This word repeatedly occurs in Sūrah Raḥmān and all its nuances are evident there. I will explain it and its usage there in the light of classical Arabic literature. My mentor, Ḥamīd al-Dīn Farāhī has presented his scholarly research on this word in his *Mufradāt al-Qur’ān*.³⁸

Section IV: (Verses 56-62)

Coming up are the closing verses of the *sūrah*. Here, at the end, as per the conventional style of the Qur’ān, the same subject with which the *sūrah* began is brought up as a reminder. It was said at the beginning that this Qur’ān should not be disregarded by considering it to be the discourse of soothsayers and astrologers; it is a divine revelation and the word of God. Like the warners of previous times, it is another warner of a similar nature. They should not regard what it is warning them of as something far off; the promised hour is near, and when it appears no one except God will be able to ward it off. They should not make fun of this discourse. It is not something to make jest of; it is something to weep about. They should wake up, prostrate before God alone and serve Him only. In the light of this background, readers may now proceed to read these verses.

Text and Translation

هَذَا نَذِيرٌ مِّنَ النَّذْرِ الْأُولَىٰ (٥٦) أَزِفَتْ الْأَزِفَةُ (٥٧) لَيْسَ لَهَا مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ كَاشِفَةٌ (٥٨)
 أَقْمِنِ هَذَا الْحَدِيثَ تَعْجَبُونَ (٥٩) وَتَضْحَكُونَ وَلَا تَبْكُونَ (٦٠) وَأَنْتُمْ سَامِدُونَ (٦١)
 فَاسْجُدُوا لِلَّهِ وَاعْبُدُوا (٦٢)

This is a warner like those before. What is near has come near. No one except Allah can avert it. So do you express wonder at this discourse! And laugh and not weep and are in a trance! [Wake up!] Prostrate your self before God alone and worship Him only. (56-62)

38. Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Farāhī, *Mufradāt al-Qur’ān*, 1st ed. (Azamgarh: Maṭba‘ Islāh, 1358 AH), 11.

Explanation

هَذَا نَذِيرٌ مِّنَ النَّذْرِ الْأُولَى (٥٦)³⁹

The demonstrative pronoun هَذَا refers to the Qur'ān. Since the whole discussion began with the Qur'ān, hence without mentioning it here at the end it is spontaneously referred to so that the relationship between the beginning and the end becomes evident. If someone regards the Prophet (sws) as the antecedent of this pronoun, it would not make much of a difference because the message delivered by the Qur'ān and the Prophet (sws) are not two distinct things. At one place in Sūrah Ṭalāq (65:10), the words ذُكِّرَا رَسُولًا occur for the Qur'ān. Obviously, the word ذُكِّرَا refers to the Qur'ān and the word رَسُولًا to the Prophet (sws); however, the style adopted is such that both are in the capacity of a single entity.

I have already presented my research on the word نَذِيرٌ at some place in this *tafsīr*. Here it is used as a plural of نَذِيرٌ and refers to all the previous prophets and scriptures. The purpose is to admonish the addressees that they should not take this discourse to be a jest or joke; if they make fun of it, they should remember that they will face its consequences in the very manner the previous nations faced them.

أَزَفَتْ الْأَزْفَةُ (٥٧) لَيْسَ لَهَا مِن دُونِ اللَّهِ كَاشِفَةٌ (٥٨)⁴⁰

The word أَزَفَتْ means something which has come near and refers to the divine punishment of which the Qur'ān was warning these people: they should not consider it to be far off; it is now looming over their heads.

I have referred to the divine practice at many places in this *tafsīr* that when a messenger of God is sent to warn a nation, it is only given enough respite in which the truth is conclusively communicated to it. As soon as this period expires, that nation is destroyed if it persists in its denial of the messenger. This divine punishment is a prelude for this nation to the punishment they will be meted out in the Hereafter. For this reason, these words depict the absolute reality from the tongue of the messenger and do not contain the slightest bit of exaggeration in them.

The words لَيْسَ لَهَا مِن دُونِ اللَّهِ كَاشِفَةٌ warn these people that they must not remain haughtily content that their deities: Lāt, Manāt and 'Uzzā besides others will be of any benefit to them when this punishment comes and will be able to save them from it. They should remember that except for God no one will be able to get rid of it.

39. This is a warner like those before.

40. What is near has come near. No one except Allah can avert it.

أَفَمِنْ هَذَا الْحَدِيثِ تَعْجَبُونَ (٥٩) وَتَضْحَكُونَ وَلَا تَبْكُونَ (٦٠)⁴¹

Amazement is expressed here at their attitude: they express wonder at the warnings sounded by a Book which is informing them of such a great punishment and telling them why and from where will it come. They should beware that this thing is not something to laugh at or make fun of; it is something to cry about and be very anxious of; however, instead of crying, they are laughing at it.

وَأَنْتُمْ سَامِدُونَ (٦١)⁴²

The words *سمد* and *سمود* mean “to be unconscious and senseless.” The verse says that this Book is trying to shake and jolt them, while they are overcome with the slumber of indifference.

فَاسْجُدُوا لِلَّهِ وَاعْبُدُوا (٦٢)⁴³

The implication of the verse is that if they want to escape danger, they should awaken themselves from this slumber and, forsaking other deities, only prostrate themselves before God and serve and worship Him only. No one except Him will be able to save them from this calamity.

This *sūrah* began with the falling and setting of stars and it ends on prostration and worship to God alone. I am thankful to God that with these lines I come to the end of this *sūrah's tafsīr*. فالحمد لله على ذلك (so gratitude be to God for this).

Raḥmānābād,
22nd July, 1977 AD
6th Sha‘bān 1397 AH

41. So do you express wonder at this discourse! And laugh and not weep.

42. And are in a trance! [Wake up!]

43. Prostrate your self before God alone and serve Him only.